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ABSTRACT

As women enter nontraditional occupations and training programs, tokenism may develop and its side-effects of visibility, contrast, and assimilation may appear. Each of these effects was encountered by the first class of women cadets at the United States Military Academy, West Point, in 1976, who received great visibility from the news media. This visibility led to fears and resentment in dominant male cadets and placed performance pressures on the token women. Cadets' concerns about dating best reflected the effects of contrast; the social interaction of men and women created uncertainties for the men and isolation for the women. The stereotype of women's physical subordination encouraged men to simultaneously protect women, yet fear preferential treatment and a lowering of Academy standards. The protection of female cadets most clearly demonstrated the assimilation of individual cadets into the stereotypical helpless role of women. An investigation of the men and women who entered West Point from 1976 to 1980 showed that increased numbers of women, institutional supports, changes in the dominant group, and cohesivess among tokens reduced the problems initially experienced by the token women. (Author/NRB)

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THE PRICE OF A TOKEN

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The Price of a Token

As women[1] break the barriers that blocked entry into certain professions and training programs, an insidious pattern of experiences may develop, a process referred to as tokenism. Tokens may experience the thrill of achievement in a new realm, but they often pay for their successes with a nagging sense of deviance. Judith Long Laws (1975, pp. 51-52) defines tokenism, its restrictions, and its unavoidable consequences:

> Tokenism is likely to be found whenever a dominant group is under pressure to share priviledge, power, or other desirable commodities with a group which is excluded. Tokenism is the means by which the dominant group advertises a promise of mobility between the dominant and excluded classes. By definition, however, tokenism involves mobility which is severely restricted in quantity, and the quality of mobility is severely restricted as well. The token does not become assimilated into the dominant group but is destined for permanent marginality. The token is a member of an underrepresented group, who is operating on the turf of the dominant group, under license from it. The institution of tokenism has advantages both for the dominant group and for the individual who is chosen to serve as token. These advantages obtain, however, only when the defining constraints are respected: the flow of outsiders into the dominant group must be restricted numerically, and they must not change the system they enter.

By this definition, and Kanter's (1977) simple numerical

definition (less than 15% of the group), the first women to enter the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1976 were clearly tokens. They were admitted in response to a Congressional mandate; these positions had, by definition, been exclusively male; and a West Point degree certainly proves advantageous for any Army officer pursuing advancement (Ellis & Moore, 1974). However, with the addition of greater numbers of women into the institution through the natural progression of annual admissions, West Point offered a chance to study both the effects of tokenism and its reduction over time. To illustrate the effects of tokenism, comparisons can be made between tokens (women) and dominants (men). The yearly increase of women in the Corps of Cadets provided an opportunity to examine reduced tokenism by the simple addition of greater numbers of outgroup members, a solution suggested by Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977). The comparison here will be between the pioneering Class of 1980 and later classes, up to the Class of 1984.[2]

Project Athena

In 1975, a year before women actively enrolled at West Point, Project Athena was formalized as a longitudinal joint effort of the Army Research Institute and the U.S. Military Academy. The goals of the project are: (a) to examine the impact the admission of women has on the Academy, (b) to examine the individual adjustment of women as cadets, and, most recently, (c) to evaluate graduate experiences and adjustment in the regular Army. The findings reported here are extracted from three sources (Vitters & Kinzer, Note 1; Vitters, Note 2; Adams, Note

3), spanning the introduction of female cadets to West Point in 1976 to the Class of 1983 whose entry makes the integration of women into each class of the Corps complete. In addition, interviews and observations of the summer training exercises of the Classes of 1983 and 1984, conducted by the first author, were used as an information source.

The subjects of the present paper are the men and women entering West Point from 1976 to 1980. One hundred nineteen women joined 1,366 men to make up the entering class of 1976. In 1977, an additional 104 women were admitted to West Point; 125 in 1978; 131 in 1979; and 151 in 1980. By the Fall of 1979, women were represented in every class (freshman-senior), and the total number of women in the Corps increased from 2% to 8% in four years.

The Price of a Token

According to Kanter (1977), tokens are visible, contrasted, and assimilated. Visibility occurs simply because the token is a novel item in a perceptual field of dominants. Visibility is a constant, obvious phenomenon. Even military uniforms do not completely integrate women into a company at West Point; a casual observer can easily identify women cadets as they march by in a parade. Visibility produces performance pressures for the tokens as their every move is noticed and easily recalled. Additionally, the natural visibility of tokens absorbs dominants into the perceptual ground, making dominants fearful that tokens may possess a competitive edge.

The contrast effect also results from the perceptual

differences between tokens and dominants, but the emphasis here is on the difference itself. Individual dominants are unique, as are individual tokens, but the within-group differences fade in comparison with between-group contrasts. These group differences, or contrasts, generate uncertainties among dominants about how to act toward tokens. Every institution has its own norms which are communicated through informal, social networks. Tokens who do not fit into this network are isolated, thus they lose an important source of information and interpersonal gratification.

Finally, the uncertainty of dominants about how to act toward different tokens can readily be reduced by the use of stereotypes. Dominants may begin to treat tokens as generalized others, a process called assimilation. From the perspective of the token, assimilation creates role encapsulation. Paradoxically, the token, although clearly visible as an unique group member, loses some of his or her individuality and simply becomes a member of a stereotyped group who is expected to act (and succeed or fail) in stereotypic ways.

Visibility

No one can deny that the admission of women into West Point received a great deal of news notoriety. Photographers were repeatedly singling out women for pictures; reporters were seeking women for personal interviews, and military VIPs were always close by as obtrusive observers to this change to West Point tradition. For example, during summer training and throughout the academic year, it was a common sight for the

dominants to observe some high ranking official or a media representative talking to a token about her early experiences or adjustment. But, as Kanter (1977) showed, even good press can be bad press when it emphasizes the visibility of tokens. This visibility, in turn, can lead to fears in dominants and preformance pressures for the tokens.

The 1980 graduation of the first class of women brought female cadets back into the limelight. Many dominants became critical of the fact that more than 200 news personnel had applied for press passes to cover the first coed graduation at West Point. The common theme among male cadets became, "It's our graduation too." It is likely that the value of graduation ceremonies, a once-in-a-lifetime event, increased for male cadets, since they were indistinctive members of the dominant group (Fromkin, 1970). This, in turn, may have enhanced the intrusiveness for the men of the attention paid to women. Resentment among dominants was an inescapable by-product of the notoriety of the successful female cadets.

This concern among dominant male cadets was evident at other times, most notably those times when competition existed for scarce, lucrative resources. Male cadets in the Class of 1980 expressed fears that women would receive first-choice assignments at the expense of men in troop leader training (summer exercises before the junior year designed to provide realistic leadership experiences). This fear also expressed itself within the military development system, a series of ratings of each cadet's leadership effectiveness which includes ratings from peers and

the cadre of upperclass cadets. A strong reason listed by cadets to prevent fraternization between women cadets and upperclass men was a fear that women would be preferentially treated.

The public law (Defense Appropriation Act of 1976; Public Law 94-106) authorizing the admission of women dictated that "...the academic and other relevant standards required for appointment, (admissions) training, graduation, and commissioning of female individuals shall be the same as those required for male individuals, except for those minimum essential adjustments in such standards required because of physiological differences between male and female individuals." Therefore, Academy officials planned very few changes to traditional programs. Women were to participate equally in the four major areas of cadet development: intellectual, military, moral/ethical, and physical.

Of these areas, the physical ability of cadets figures substantially into their success at West Point (Yoder, Rice, Adams, Priest, & Prince, Note 4). It is in this area that gender differences are most pronounced, and that West Point was given the leeway to make accommodating changes. It is also in this area that women felt the strongest performance pressures and that institutional changes were most striking.

There is ample evidence that women in the first class felt pressured to perform well. For example, during Cadet Basic Training, women reported feeling more stressed than did men. By the end of the two-month initiation period, 16% of the women and 10% of the men left the Academy. Women entering in 1976 pushed

themselves by ignoring physical maladies. These women missed physical training on a medical excuse half as often as later classes of women. As one tactical officer commented, "The women who fallout[3] really try hard to earn peer acceptance. They run on their own in their free time in the evening, but the daily training demands are so great on the body that these women are only continuing to tear down rather than build up their stamina" (Adams, Note 2, p. 132).

Based on several studies, senior Academy officials adopted a policy of equivalent training in some physical tasks for women and men. These studies provided empirical evidence to describe anthropormetric differences between men and women. However, these modifications in the physical education program to take into account the physiological differences between men and women were critically accepted by some male cadets as evidence that the admission of women resulted in lower standards. During the conduct of interviews with officers at the various training sites, one officer indicated that he no longer wore his West Point class ring to symbolize his rejection of the "new" Academy. A recurrent pattern in these interviews was for Academy personnel to equate substitutions, modifications, and deletions of physical activities with "lowered standards." It appears that one potential consequence of adding token members to an organization is lowered ratings of occupational prestige (Touhey, 1974).

Contrast

It is cadets' concerns about dating that best reflected the effects of contrast. The social interaction of men and women at

the Academy created uncertainties for the dominant men that did not exist before the admission of women. In response to a survey, some cadets defined dating as seeing two cadets together on multiple occasions, and they regarded mere association as evidence of favoritism. This broad interpretation of the social interaction of women and men served to isolate women. Many dating cadets have been verbally and nonverbally harassed. The result was an atmosphere in which women were defensive and wary of peer interactions that would otherwise have been professionally and personally gratifying.

Senior officials at the Academy have initiated several interventions designed to reduce the uncertainties of dominants about how to act toward tokens. For example, educational and training seminars and workshops have been conducted with dominant members in leadership roles. The focus of these activities has been on learning how to cope with the dynamics of mixed-sex units. Dating and fraternization (improper senior- subordinate relationships) policies were revised to provide clearer guidelines about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

Assimilation

The stereotype that women are physically subordinate to men encouraged men to simultaneously protect women and fear the preferential treatment of women and lowering of the Academy's standards. It is the protection of female cadets that most clearly demonstrated the assimilation of individual cadets into the stereotypical helpless role of women. During the summer training at Camp Buckner where teams of sophomore cadets were

required to assemble a temporary bridge, women were given less strenuous roles by their male peers and were physically relieved of heavy burdens. Specifically, interviews indicated that women of small stature and those who did not possess a "command voice" were most frequently the targets of stereotyping, being assigned to less strenuous roles by team leaders.

Reducing Tokenism

Although there are many negative consequences of tokenism, it is frequently a necessary first step in opening the doors for outgroup members. Sexism has not been eradicated from West Point. However, the odious comparisons of outgroup members and disparaging remarks toward women cadets have been effectively reduced. Traditionally, the U.S. Military Academy has been a bastion of the macho image. Changes have been made, and plans are continually being formulated, implemented, and evaluated to achieve the goal of a truly egalitarian institution. With this caution in mind, let us review the progress that has been made thus far. This progress can be attributed to three agents: the institution, the dominant group, and individual tokens.

Institutional Policies

The institutional supports for reducing the token status of women cadets fall into three categories: increased numbers over time, sustained commitment to the success of women, and a reassessment of training goals. Kanter (1977) suggested that increasing the number of outgroup members in an organization will reduce tokenism. The female cadets of 1976 comprised 2% of the Corps; on graduating, women made up 8% of the Corps. (The

largest class of women, 151 or slightly over 10% of the Class of 1984, recently entered the Academy.)

As the number of women at West Point increased, some problems of the first class disappeared. Later classes of women were willing to admit physical illness or injury. Attrition rates for women leveled off, and are more comparable to the percentages of men leaving each class. As women entered the ranks of upperclass cadets, they became the members of the cadet chain of command who lead and evaluate underclass cadets. These upperclass women, as well as new female tactical officers and female faculty members (military and civilian), serve as role models (Darley, 1976). Simply put, time is an ally of change.

Although the passage of time has helped soothe the impact of change at West Point, it clearly is not a sufficient solution. In the course of many interviews conducted during the summer training sessions in 1980, some cadets and officers alike still voiced doubts about the admission of women. But the bottom line in all these conversations is that the orders are clear and unwavering: women are to be integrated into the Corps of Cadets. "Women are coming to West Point," wrote the former Superintendent in 1975. "We have our orders, and it is our responsibility to implement them to the best of our ability" (Vitters & Kinzer, Note 1, p 10). This philosophy has persisted at West Point; officially, the debate about the appropriateness of cadet women ended in 1975. The present Superintendent, in his annual Fall address to the staff and faculty, stated that women are at West Point to stay. He cemented his position by offering to arrange

for the reassignment of any staff member who felt that he or she could not support women at the Academy. Unwavering institutional support has contributed to the successes of the token group (Fettigrew, 1961).

The final institutional support involved a reassessment of training goals. Recognizing the impact of physical ability on performance ratings and peer acceptance, a series of studies was conducted, and changes were made in the training schedules of freshmen and sophomore cadets. Most changes centered around differential upper body strength. In reviewing these changes, and the resultant cries by some Academy personnel that standards have been lowered, an underlying bias has emerged: each change was made to reduce the failures of female cadets, not to exploit the valuable contributions women have to offer. Virginia O'Leary's (1974, p. 813) warning is pertinent: "...the adoption of male-valued traits (i.e., rational, analytic orientation) may preclude the development and/or expression of traits highly valued in the female." Although the institutional supports in making changes are laudable, future efforts should consider women as valuable resources, not potential liabilities.

Dominant Group

Change in the dominant group, male cadets and officers at West Point, occurred over time aiding in the integration of women into the Academy. People assigned to West Point since 1976 expect women to be part of the Corps. When women in the pioneering class arrived in 1976, the all-male classes preceding them had been caught up in the debate about the appropriateness

and viability of admitting women. As these classes graduated and new classes took their place, men in each subsequent class have more egalitarian attitudes toward women's roles in society in general.[4] Additionally, institutional policy forbids anti-female expressions, which although seemingly superficial, may be a first step toward changing attitudes by changing, or at least creating an awareness of, discriminatory behaviors (Deutsch & Collins, 1951).

Tokens Themselves

Women at West Point have a natural advantage over tokens in many other institutions: although female cadets comprise a small percentage of the Corps, they are a formidable group in terms of numbers. Unlike the lone token executive, women at the Academy share their experiences with other female classmates. This allows natural social comparison (Festinger, 1954) processes to occur (Darley, 1976). Female support groups (Laws, 1975) are available, most notably the women's intercollegiate basketball team and the Corbin seminar, an extracurricular group formed to deal with women's issues. In the Class of 1980, female cadets did not exploit these resources to the fullest and, subsequently, many have left West Point feeling less positive about their experiences than did their male counterparts (Priest, Grove, & Adams, Note 6). The availability of support groups is not sufficient. Institutional and peer support needs to demonstrate to women that membership in these groups will have no formal or informal negative consequences, and the women themselves need to actively seek out and support each other.

Informal observations of recent classes of female cadets uncovered some changes in this area. A look at training exercises, especially the obstacle courses, showed women pairing and clustering in groups to provide both informational and moral support. Upcoming, planned research at the Academy will focus on role conflicts and the successful and unsuccessful strategies women cadets use to cope with these conflicts.

Tokenism is a process which has been described within business (Kanter, 1977), academics (Laws, 1975), and, in the present paper, the military. But, longitudinal data collections at West Point allowed the authors to venture beyond description into the realm of prescription. Tokenism may simply be a first step in the integration process, if large numbers of outgroup members can not immediately be admitted into an institution en masse (a solution that avoids tokenism). Also, tokenism may be a first step if institutional supports are such that the negative effects of tokenism are reduced over time. The latter is the case for West Point, where growing numbers of women, unwavering institutional support, and time have helped to facilitate the integration of women into the Corps of Cadets of the United States Military Academy.

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Footnotes

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[1]Although tokenism is not necessarily a gender-related issue, the focus of most references and the data set used here deal with tokenism as a feminist concern.

[2]An entering class at the U. S. Military Academy is identified by the year the members expect to graduate. For example, the first women who entered the Academy in the summer of 1976 graduated four years later in the Class of 1980.

[3]Fallout is a term used to identify a cadet who fails to complete a specified running exercise within 15 seconds of the larger group. Women who fell out did not necessarily stop running, rather they finished the exercise at a slower pace than did the group as whole.

[4]These atitudes were measured by Spence and Helmreich's (1972) Attitudes toward Women Scale.